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6-6-1965

National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): News Article 13

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Recommended Citation

Taurman, Howard, "National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): News Article 13" (1965). *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967)*. Paper 38.
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THE NEW YORK TIMES
SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 1965

The Importance Of Subsidies

By HOWARD TAUBMAN

IT'S too bad. The partnership of the Association of Producing Artists and the Phoenix Theater has failed to get the foundation grant it applied for, and plans for expanded activities have been deferred, though not yet frustrated.

APA-Phoenix expected to move its New York activities from the 299-seat Phoenix Theater on East 74th Street to the more spacious and conveniently located Lyceum Theater. Rather than attempt such a move without proper financing, APA-Phoenix has postponed it for a year. The company now must return to wandering while an effort is made to raise the necessary funds.

One cannot blame APA-Phoenix for electing postponement. It has learned that receipts from ticket sales at a 299-seat house, even if sold to capacity at every performance, are not sufficient to provide decent salaries for the members of a repertory company. And it rightly believes that it would be gravely hampered if it came down to the Lyceum without the money to enlarge the repertory.

Future Hopes

The APA-Phoenix long-range design looks to a repertory of about 10 plays a season, a larger acting company and three new productions each year. It believes that it can build its subscription rolls at the 1,000-seat Lyceum to 20,000 compared with the 7,500 it could accommodate at the Phoenix.

To put these ambitious plans into effect a substantial capital fund is indispensable. APA would like to raise \$1,500,000, and it intends to approach foundations, corporations and private citizens for contributions.

In a joint statement T. Edward Hambleton and Ellis Rabb, APA-Phoenix's managing and artistic directors, declared:

"We and the entire company are convinced that any compromise of this expanded program could very well destroy our progress to date.

We are certain, after our experience this season, that APA-Phoenix has made and must continue to make a unique contribution to the national theater scene through its New York-based operations. It is also evident that such a program is extremely expensive, requiring substantial subsidy. Our only move, therefore, must be to a larger house and this we mean to make possible in the coming months."

On the strength of what it has accomplished, APA-Phoenix deserves the financial support it seeks. APA serves not only New York but acts as the company in residence at the University of Michigan for a couple of months each fall as part of the school's Professional Theater Program. At Michigan next fall it plans to mount the premiere of Archibald MacLeish's new play, "Herakles."

Backing Needed

The impetus for the founding of resident professional companies in the United States shows no sign of declining. While the trend is encouraging, there is a danger that must not be blinked. It is too easily forgotten that a solid, permanent company cannot be expected, except in the rarest of circumstances, to be self-sustaining.

When Mr. Hambleton and Mr. Rabb speak of the need for a "substantial subsidy," they articulate a desideratum of nearly all permanent companies in and out of New York. It is possible that such companies could operate in the black at times, but this should not be the test of their validity. Whatever the cost, an adult, exciting theater is not an ornament but a necessity in a civilized community.

It is not enough to give such a theater support at the outset. There should be continuous backing. If the theater gets by without a deficit, its sponsors, instead of drawing comfort from the feat, might well wonder whether it is doing all it should for the drama and the community.

No one expects a library to be self-sustaining. No one any longer thinks that a first-class symphony orchestra can be maintained without a sizable annual deficit. Wherever one goes, one finds that prideful cities take it for granted that they must raise large sums to balance their orchestra's books. But they are slow to recognize that a lively permanent theater needs regular subsidies.

It is easy to see why there is confusion about the economic status of resident theater companies. The nation is habituated to commercial theater, a theater of risk whose individual productions pay for themselves or go under. This may be fine for producers, authors and performers willing to take chances in the hope of striking it rich. But for those who want stage careers with continuity, a prospect of artistic growth and some small measure of security another form of theatrical life is preferable.

APA-Phoenix offers such a life to its cooperative troupe. And New York can use APA-Phoenix. Don't think that the Lincoln Center Repertory Theater, even if it rights itself and thrives in the seasons to come, can answer completely the metropolis's need for mature drama. The commercial theater will continue to have its place, but New York could use a dozen permanent companies as well.

Foundations that donate large sums to artistic enterprises generally work on the theory that they will provide seed money and that others must then take over the financial burden. A theater probably is better off if it does not begin to think of itself as any foundation's pensioner.

The community as a whole must assume the responsibility. Possibly we are approaching the day when such responsibility will be shared by local, state and Federal governments, foundations, corporations and private citizens. But assumed it must be if we are to keep in being admirable companies like APA-Phoenix.

In solid agreement are President Richard S. White of Automation Engineering Laboratory, and President R. V. Hansberger of Boise Cascade Corp. "Business," White declares, "has the responsibility of supporting all social, civic and education needs of our society to the extent practical." In the same vein, Hansberger points out that businesses, "as the economic stewards of a community, have strong responsibility to the cultural levels in the community."

The sentiment of numerous panel members is summed up by President George M. Holley Jr. of Holley Carburetor Co. when he comments: "The stockholders invested for a return on investment—not to support the arts." In terms of the shareholders' interests, the only conditions under which financing culture makes sense, avers President Frank J. Nunlist of Worthington Corp., is when such support is used as a morale builder or a customer relations device. Or, chimes in President A. Lightfoot Walker of Rheem Manufacturing Co.: "When such support results in more profits."

Other panelists, too, offer a spirited protest against "saddling" business with such responsibility. After all, speculates Diamond Crystal Salt Co. President Charles F. Moore, "Once you start supporting the arts, where do you stop?" Tartly observes President Edwin L. Parker of A. G. Spalding & Bros.: "Business has its hands full being business." If, by some chance, business has any spare time or money, Parker suggests, "it should sell the American spirit, not folk dancing."

On this rather sticky issue, many panelists lean toward a middle position. For example, American Optical Co. President E. Weldon Schumacher thinks that if "support of art projects helps the community in which business operates, some support is justified, otherwise not." And President Walter N. Plaut of Lehn & Fink Products Corp. agrees with those executives who believe that a "return" is necessary from any investment, even in the arts. However, Plaut's concept of "return" is sufficiently broad to encompass such factors as community recognition and enhancement of the corporate image, which ultimately benefit shareholders.

Quite a few panel participants see no conflict in a company's obligations to its shareholders and obligations to the

arts. "The quality of the business," says Boise Cascade's Hansberger, "is directly related to the quality of its personnel. This, in turn, is strongly related to the cultural level of the community." Supporting this view is Carrier Corp. President William Bynum, who believes that the cultural climate of a community has considerable influence on the quality of people in that community. And President Laurence Mallinckrodt of Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney sees business help for the arts creating a kind of cycle of improvement. Corporate support, reasons Mallinckrodt, improves the civic atmosphere, which in turn yields economic benefits, and these redound to the good of the shareholder.

Only a handful of the leading industrialists who make up the Presidents' Panel believe that business as a whole is not giving sufficient support to the arts. One of these, SKF's Broden, suggests that industry's contributions are funneled generally into what he terms "areas claiming priority of human need," such as health, welfare and education, rather than into the arts. Chairman William H. Ruffin of Erwin Mills takes a more practical view of the matter, and attributes the failure of corporations to give as freely as they might to the arts to the fact that many potential donors do not "realize the value of the corporate public image."

Still another analysis is offered by International Pipe's Hirsh. "Industry," Hirsh is convinced, "thinks of support of the arts as charitable and not as a concept of enlarging a market potential." Agreed, says Daniels of Archer-Daniels-Midland, that business is not supporting cultural activity as much as it might. But the fault, he suggests, is not industry's alone. The various arts, too, have a responsibility to "organize effectively to solicit funds and support from business."

Among the more aggressive proponents of corporate leadership in cultural life, Chairman E. L. Steiniger of Sinclair Oil Corp. believes that such leadership can be especially exerted in large municipal undertakings, and cites the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City as an example.

Such leadership, explains Boise Cascade's Hansberger, works two ways. Not only is it good for the community, it also is good for the corporate individuals who plunge into cultural activities since it

tends to broaden their horizons. Hansberger proudly cites the involvement of his own company and Container Corp. of America in the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies in Aspen, Colorado, as "an example of a major impact from corporate support."

There are other examples too. H. H. Scott, to illustrate, notes that the Boston Opera has been "largely supported by individuals and corporations." On a like note, International Pipe's Hirsh points to the "conception and building" of the Los Angeles Music Center as a monument to business support of the arts, while Ruffin of Erwin Mills is quick to publicize the development of the North Carolina Symphony as an instance of what industrial help can mean to a regional cultural organization. Turning to a different medium, SKF's Broden cites the Esso Repertory Theatre, one of television's better offerings, as an illustration of the virtues of corporate support of culture.

Several panelists go even further, contending that a good-sized business can invigorate the cultural climate of an entire city. Thanks to Owens-Illinois Glass, this is just what has happened in Toledo, claims Lehn & Fink's Plaut.

In like manner, John Daniels singles out Minneapolis "as a good example of a city that has achieved considerable growth in the arts because of business support and interest." Daniels' company is prominent among those that have helped to foster such growth by supporting drama, symphony, opera and art. It was decided to contribute to these particular areas of culture, discloses Daniels, because they were deemed "the most important and wide-ranging in their impact on the community."

Perhaps because it is the least organized of all the arts, literature, winds up a very distant last when it comes to corporate support. Writers, of course, are a dyspeptic lot, frequently given to biting the hand that feeds them. Nonetheless, among the brave few cash boosters of literary endeavor are Boise Cascade and Sinclair Oil.

Obviously, there are as many points of view among business leaders on support of the arts as there are interpretations to a Picasso painting. But this is only to be expected. For as General Aniline's Jesse Werner puts it: "The business community is as diversified as the individuals that make it up." —END